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ABSTRACT

The goal of this research was to explore how filial piety and interpersonal contact with gay persons relates to attitudes toward lesbians and gay men in a Chinese sample from Taiwan. Sex differences of respondents and the intensity differences of attitudes toward lesbians and gay men were also investigated. The participants were 187 undergraduates (68 males, 119 females) from a major university in Taiwan. The Filial Piety Scale and the Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gay Men Scale were employed. The results indicated that respondents' attitudes toward lesbians and gay men were correlated with filial piety and interpersonal contact. However, the contact effect only holds for men, not for women. In addition, men hold more intolerant attitudes toward lesbians and gay men than do women. These findings support the notion that internalized filial piety relates to Chinese people's intolerant attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. Thus, negative attitudes toward gay persons serve a functional purpose. (Contains 10 references.) (Author/JDM)

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# Filial Piety and Sexual Prejudice in Chinese Culture

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Abstract

The goal of this research was to explore how filial piety and interpersonal contact with gay persons relates to attitudes toward lesbians and gay men in a Chinese sample from Taiwan. Sex differences of respondents and the intensity differences of attitudes toward lesbians and gay men were also investigated. The participants were 187 undergraduates (68 males, 119 females) from a major University in Taiwan. The Filial Piety Scale (Ho & Lee, 1974) and The Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale (Herek, 1988) were employed. The results indicate that respondents' attitudes toward lesbians and gay men are correlated with filial piety and interpersonal contact. However, the contact effect only holds for men, not for women. In addition, men hold more intolerant attitudes toward lesbians and gay men than do women. These findings support the notion that internalized filial piety relates to Chinese people's intolerant attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. Thus, negative attitudes toward gay persons serve a functional purpose (Herek, 1986, 1987, 1994).

## Introduction

Same-gender sexual behaviors were tolerated in classic China (Hinsch, 1990; Ruan, 1991). "Homosexuality" as a medical term of was probably translated and introduced into China in the late nineteenth century (Lau & Ng, 1989). Chinese people learned about the "sickness" of homosexuality in the process of modernization or westernization in the twentieth century. The modern concepts of lesbians and gay men were imported into Chinese societies in the past few decades (Hinsch, 1990). Chinese people felt puzzled about the concepts of lesbians and gay men because these ideas had been constructed in the context of modern western societies, which are quite different from traditional Chinese cultures (Chen, 1995). In fact, lesbians and gay men in modern China have been seen as a crime against social morality, a mental illness, a western idea that does not exist in China, or the result of western influences (Ruan, 1991).

Confucianism, a Chinese philosophy and religion, has shaped Chinese people's social behaviors for centuries, and continues to do so today. Filial piety is ranked as the highest virtue within Confucian doctrine, which emphasizes the production of male offspring to maintain the family name as well as to offer sacrifices after death (Wawrytko, 1993). Consequently, since the gay lifestyle is a threat to the continuity of the family, it is difficult for people who endorse filial piety to accept lesbians and gay men.

The goal of this research is to explore how filial piety relates to Chinese people's attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. In addition, the influence of prior interpersonal contact with lesbians and gay men, sex differences of respondents, and the intensity differences of negative attitudes toward lesbians and gay men were investigated.

## Method

Participants: Participants were 187 undergraduates (68 males, 119 females) from Fu Jen University in Taiwan. The mean age was 21.0 (it would be 20.0 in the American reckoning). The percentage of participants knowing at least one relative, friend, or close acquaintance who is gay was 38.0%.

Procedure: Two scales in Chinese form were employed in this study. The Chinese version of The Filial Piety Scale (FP) was developed by Ho and Lee (1974). The translation from English to Chinese of the short version of The Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale (ATLG, Herek, 1998) was done by the first author and was reviewed by a social psychologist who is proficient in both English and Chinese well and is familiar with gay issues.

Participants were asked to complete the two scales and one paged demographic information at various campus settings including libraries, classrooms, and dormitories during October and November 1999. The data were collected by the first author and two colleagues.

## Results

Using a sample of Chinese students, the research found that:

(1) Regardless of gender, respondents with more positive attitudes toward filial piety held more intolerant attitudes toward lesbians and toward gay men than did those with less positive attitudes toward filial piety.

(2) Male, but not female, respondents with interpersonal contact with gay people held more positive attitudes toward lesbians and toward gay men than do those without such experiences.

(3) Regardless of gender, respondents held more intolerant attitudes toward gay men than toward lesbians. Male respondents held more intolerant attitudes toward lesbians and toward gay men than did female respondents.

## Conclusion

These findings support the notion that internalized filial piety underlies Chinese people's intolerant attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. In addition, the findings supported the validity of the functional theory of attitudes (Herek, 1986, 1987, 1994). Negative attitudes toward lesbians and gay men seem to fulfill functional need in terms of filial piety.

This study appears to be the first of its kind in Chinese societies. We offer several suggestions for future research. As the next step, replication with samples representative of the general public will be very important to determine whether the same findings would hold beyond student samples. Second, future research should explore other cultural factors that are associated with intolerant attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. Third, more sophisticated research on the effect of interpersonal contact on attitudes toward lesbians and gay men is needed. Finally, qualitative research is necessary to obtain the in-depth understanding of Chinese people's attitudes toward lesbians and gay men

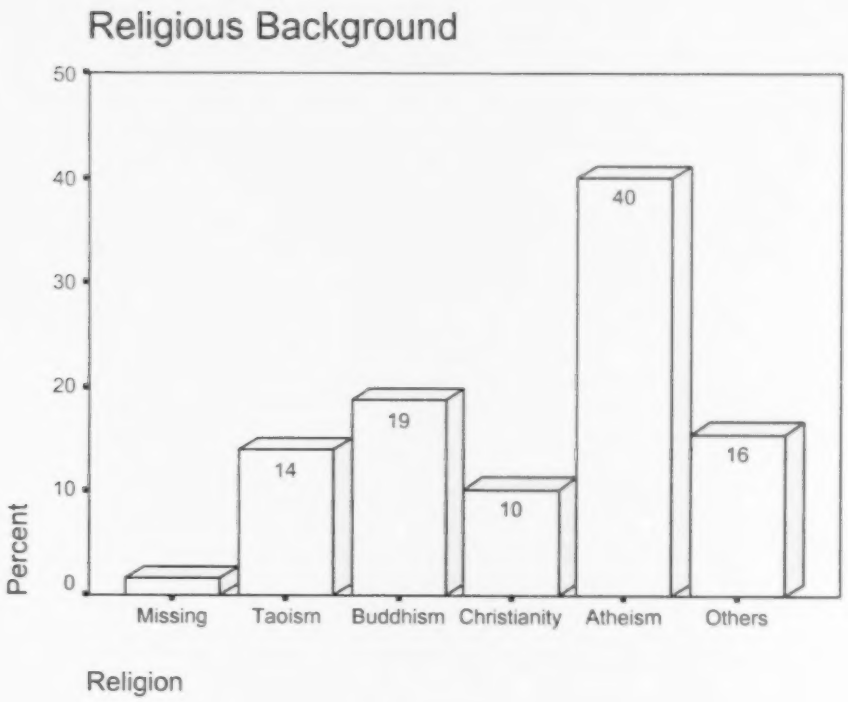
Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Pearson Correlation Among Filial Piety Scale, Attitudes Toward Gay men Subscale, and Attitudes Toward Lesbians Subscale

| Measure | M | SD | FP | ATG | ATL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Male Participants (n = 68) | | | |
| FP | 70.7 | 10.9 | - | - | - |
| ATG | 16.3 | 5.3 | .31** | - | - |
| ATL | 15.3 | 5.1 | .33** | .88** | - |
| | | Female Participants (n = 119) | | | |
| FP | 70.5 | 9.8 | - | - | - |
| ATG | 14.4 | 4.8 | .20* | - | - |
| ATL | 14.0 | 5.1 | .18* | .94** | - |

Note. FP = Filial Piety Scale (higher scores indicate more positive attitudes toward filial piety). ATG = Attitudes Toward Gay Men Subscale (higher scores indicate more intolerant 1attitudes toward gay men). ATL = Attitudes Toward Lesbians Subscale (higher scores indicate more intolerant attitudes toward lesbians).
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Figure 1




Note. Others include folk religion (5.3%), no religion (4.3%), non-specific religion, (3.2%), more than one religion (1.6%), and I-Guan-Dau (1.1%)

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